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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Outcomes of the V4 meeting of the Ministers responsible for agriculture (Znojmo, Czech Republic, 26 September 2023) - Information from the Czech delegation on behalf of the Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak delegations

Delegations will find in the Annex a document on the above subject to be presented by the Czech delegation, on behalf of the Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak delegations under "Any other business" at the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 23-24 October 2023.

Outcomes of the V4 meeting of the Ministers responsible for agriculture (Znojmo, Czech Republic, 26 September 2023)

In view of the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group (V4), a meeting of V4 Ministers of Agriculture took place on 26 September in Znojmo (Moravia, Czech Republic). The agenda of the meeting included items related to the current situation on agricultural markets and the increasing fragmentation of forest-related policies at the EU level. The discussion also touched upon the latest developments, particularly in the field of agricultural markets in the context of the events following the lifting of EU measures on 15 September. The Ukrainian Minister of Agrarian Policy and Food, Mr. Mykola Solskyj, also attended this point online. The aim of this item is to inform the Agriculture and Fisheries Council (AGRIFISH) of the outcome of the discussion.

The situation on agricultural markets is changing dynamically in the light of current events and many EU farmers are facing a very difficult situation. The effects of Russian aggression are being felt in a number of agricultural sectors. The V4 ministers are concerned about the lack of storage capacity for commodities from this year's harvest due to the overcrowding of storage facilities with last year's grain and the oversaturation of the Ukrainian commodities on the sales markets.

The V4 Ministers of Agriculture therefore agreed on the need to develop a long-term EU-wide solution to this situation.

Effective mechanisms must be found to increase the transit of commodities to their destinations, both in third countries and in regions of the Union where there is a shortage. The ministers stress the need to ensure the competitiveness of European farmers and to prevent them from facing existential problems due to market oversupply. There is also a need to find solutions to the high export costs that Ukrainian commodities in particular are burdened with.

According to the V4 ministers, active communication and negotiation between the European Commission and the Ukraine is necessary in order to fulfil the original goal of the Solidarity Lanes, which is to facilitate exports of Ukrainian agricultural products to third countries in need and deficit regions in the EU.

In connection with the above mentioned, the V4 Ministers consider the following points to be key:

- 1) Unified European solution strengthening the principles of the single market in line with Single Market rules and EU trade policy.
- 2) Commission's active engagement in negotiations with Ukraine to guarantee that market and logistical problems are efficiently addressed, fair conditions of competition in the EU and Ukraine.
- 3) Strengthening of logistics capacities to further increase the transit through neighbouring Member States without market distortions on in frontline Member States in particular.
- 4) Introducing an effective, sustainable, volume-efficient mechanisms including built-in incentives and control of compliance with the designated final destination.
- 5) The need for active and transparent communication to all Member States.

In the second part of the meeting, the V4 ministers confirmed their concerns about the increasing fragmentation of forest-related policies at the EU level. Forestry is becoming a key cross-cutting issue in the light of the nature protection and the climate change mitigation and adaptation. This field is included in the legislative proposals published by the European Commission in areas falling under the remit not only of DG Agriculture and Rural Development, but also DG Environment, DG Health and Food Safety and DG Climate Action. Given the horizontal overlap of many forest-related proposals, these documents are often not primarily discussed at the AGRIFISH Council, but mainly at the Environment Council or even at the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Councils.

Ministers agreed that this issue needs to be dealt with sensitively within the EU Council and they called for a stronger role of AGRIFISH Council and its Working Party on Forestry, and the Standing Forestry Committee. Greater involvement of this Committee would also help improve communication between Member States and the European Commission. The ministers considered the following key points:

- 1) The need to strengthen the role of the Standing Forestry Committee as a coordinating platform in the substantive discussion in the preparation of forest-related legislative proposals.

- 2) Rejection of the attempt to include forestry issues in shared competence and maintaining the principle of subsidiarity.
 - 3) Preserving the importance of the Working Party on Forestry, which should serve to deal with forest-related policies and legislative proposals in the Council.
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